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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the present and future scope and direction of adult vocational education. It focused on major forces that influence program planning and development, new and expanding program services, program planning and implementation strategies, and emerging issues within the field. Information was obtained in two ways: through a literature review of studies contained in two national computer databases and through a series of structured interviews with 26 officials of community colleges, public schools, professional associations, labor unions, and private industry in 19 areas. Five emerging issues were identified: (1) needs analysis; (2) collaborative efforts among providers; (3) instructor development; (4) industry-based training; and (5) evaluation and follow-up activities. Recommendations were made to improve processes in these five areas because of their impact upon vocational education in the future. (KC)

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Working Papers

ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: EMERGING ISSUES IN THE 90s

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Adult Vocational Education: Emerging Issues in the 90s

We have entered an age in which adult vocational education is no longer an option for most Americans. Adults, in growing numbers, are seeking job-related instruction in response to a wide range of social and economic forces. Changing demographic patterns, new work place requirements, and major structural changes in business and industry help explain the growth in demand for adult programs and services. We are also seeing greater awareness that training is an important key to improving our nation's productivity.

Although adults represent a growing and important market for vocational education, there is some evidence that the vocational education community is unwilling or unable to meet the continuing education needs of this population. A review of adult vocational education enrollment by state reveals considerable unevenness in the delivery of offerings to adult learners. Many traditional education establishments -- public school systems, area vocational schools, and community colleges -- have failed to make adult education an integral part of their education programs. According to Smith (1985), few traditional adult education providers are making strategic plans to accommodate the growing needs of adult learners. Furthermore, as stated by Harmon (1985):

> Devoid of the cohesion that characterizes most educational systems, adult education generally remains in the throes of a seemingly perpetual quest for identity, both in terms of its intellectual underpinnings and its organizational persona.

With recent increases in the numbers of providers of adult education, including agencies that historically did not provide any, there has come to be a lack of clarity about adult vocational education (Harmon, 1985). This lack of clarity, the inconsistencies found from state to state regarding who is responsible for delivering adult vocational education services, and the lack of comprehensive planning for meeting the needs of a rapidly growing population have impeded the growth of adult vocational education.

Purpose and Objectives of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the present and future scope and direction of adult vocational education. In so doing, the study focused on major forces that influence program planning and development, new and expanding program services, program planning and implementation strategies, and emerging issues within the field.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify major forces that have influenced adult vocational education program planning and implementation.
2. Identify areas for expanding the scope of adult vocational education beyond the provision of instructional services.
3. Examine the relevance and importance of traditional adult vocational education planning and implementation strategies.
4. Identify emerging issues faced by providers of adult vocational education as they cope with new demands for programs and services.

Special Note: A paper concerning this study was presented during the 1989 Marketing Education Conclave at the Marketing Education Research Dissemination Seminar. The paper that was presented focused on objectives 1-3 of the study. This paper will focus on objective 4 of the study.

Methods and Procedures

Two primary methods were used to obtain information concerning the present and future scope and direction of adult vocational education in the United States. First, a thorough review of the literature was conducted. ERIC and ABI-INFORM computer literature searches were conducted, from which major documents were identified and analyzed. The second method involved a series of structured interviews with personnel who work directly with adult vocational education for public and private agencies. These agencies included community college systems, public school systems, professional associations, labor unions, and private industry. Nineteen research sites throughout the United States were visited and 26 individuals were interviewed. Once the literature review and interviews were completed, the information was analyzed and synthesized.

Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Results Relative to Emerging Issues

As adult vocational educators attempt to cope with new demands and operate in an ever changing environment, several issues have emerged. These emerging issues relate to (a) needs analysis, (b) collaboration efforts among providers, (c) instructor development, (d) industry-based training, and (e) evaluation and follow-up activities.

Needs analysis. Needs analysis can be viewed as a service which can be offered to a variety of client groups. As training problems become more complex, this service may grow in importance. The providers of adult vocational education who possess the expertise to conduct an effective needs analysis may

achieve a competitive advantage in the community they serve. Two primary issues have emerged relative to needs analysis. They include building a staff that, indeed, have the expertise to conduct the analysis and the pricing of needs analysis. The preparation of staff to administer needs analysis will require considerable inservice training. Once the staff is trained, the actual collection and study of information related to training needs can be very time consuming. Providers of this service must decide whether or not to charge for the service and how much to charge.

Collaboration efforts among providers. Although collaborative efforts among adult vocational education providers can be a tremendous asset, several issues emerge when one considers these efforts. One issue relates to sacrificing a desired image as well as high priority goals. Another issue relates to the time and resources required to establish and maintain cooperative efforts. Still, another issue is the fact that collaboration may restrict educational opportunities, resulting in the public having fewer choices and paying higher prices. The issue of reciprocity also emerges when collaboration among adult education providers is being considered. Each party involved must gain something and in many cases may also lose something.

Instructor development. The goal of instructor development should be to develop instructors who can use a variety of approaches depending on the objectives of the training program and the needs of the client group. Decisions concerning the amount and type of inservice education needed by adult instructors represents a major issue facing adult education providers. Another issue relates to the inservice format. Staff development can take many forms, including workshops, self-instructional modules, and observation/feedback sessions. Another issue that emerges is whether or not inservice education, of any type, should be required.

Industry-based training. Since adult vocational education is a relatively recent entrant into industry-based training, the literature concerning its role and impact is meager. That, in itself, is an issue. What is the role of adult vocational education in this type of training and what impact should it make? The aggressive promotion of industry-based training in some states has created a demand for instruction that is close to exceeding supply. The issue here, relates to how to select recipients when too many businesses apply for a limited supply of low-cost training. Furthermore, the need to evaluate and document accomplishments in industry-based training represents another issue that has emerged.

Evaluation and follow-up activities. Without evaluation and follow-up there is no objective way to determine whether or not training has made a difference. Furthermore, evaluation is a two-dimensional effort involving the assessment of program

outcomes as well as the means of achieving these outcomes. The expertise needed to conduct valid and reliable evaluation and follow-up activities has emerged as an issue faced by adult vocational education providers. The expertise needed in this area may be beyond that of the provider. Another issue relates the expense necessary to plan and initiate these activities. To improve program quality may require an increase in funding.

Conclusions and Recommendations Relative to Emerging Issues

Based on the results of the study the following general conclusions and recommendations were made:

Needs analysis. As training problems become more complex, need analysis will need to be viewed as an important planning and implementation strategy. Providers of adult vocational education should consider the employment of staff who are skilled in using several different needs assessment methods. Ideally, the provider should be in a position to access those methods that provide the diversity and flexibility to meet the needs of a wide range of client groups. Those providers who possess the expertise to conduct an effective needs analysis can achieve a competitive advantage in the community they serve.

Collaboration efforts among providers. Major providers of adult vocational education have frequently operated independently and have not attempted to engage in cooperative arrangements that could benefit adult program participants, the organizations themselves, and society in general. As the demand for adult vocational education increases, and we see an increase in the number of providers, the practice of operating autonomously should be discouraged. The benefits of collaboration include a reduction of program duplication, improved program quality and in many cases, a reduction in program expenses that result from the pooling of resources and the sharing of facilities and equipment.

Instructor development. The quality of instruction is a very important variable in adult vocational education. Because many of the part-time instructors have little or no formal preparation for adult teaching assignments, they should be encouraged to participate in instructor development programs that enhance their practical experience.

Industry-based training. As a dimension of the total learning enterprise, industry-based training will likely increase in size, scope, and influence in the immediate future. Interest in this type of training has been fueled by rapid and pervasive technological changes, new levels of competition, and a growing awareness that steps must be taken to improve the quality of American products and services. We need to encourage the use of various industry-based training models and the careful evaluation of these models. This type of training has the potential to make a major contribution to our nation's productivity.

Evaluation and follow-up activities. Adult vocational education program results should be measured in terms of enrollee learning and, ultimately, performance on the job. If you want a true indicator of success, then you must determine what changes have taken place in the people served. We must also assess the means of achieving instructional outcomes. For the evaluation process to be meaningful and for the findings to be usable, it is imperative that all persons concerned with the program of instruction be involved in the evaluation process. This approach includes the program administrator, the instructor, the learners, and in those cases where the enrollee is employed, the employer may be involved.

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